

## THE CRACKER'S COURTSHIP.

You see how I done my courtin'. It's rather long ago.

An' I couldn't tell you how I loved, nor why I loved her so.

It was durin' our plowin' time; an' one day in the spring:

When Ist ez I wuz thinkin' uv her, I hearn my sweetheart singin'.

Wuz in the orch'd workin', an' smellin' sich perfume.

Ez a feller's allus plittin' thar when the cherry wuz in bloom.

I wuz kinder tired like, an' I thought I'd rest awhile.

So I left the plow an' hoes, an' sot down on the stile.

Where the cherry tree was stanin' like a snow-ball in its white.

While the cows a strollin' home,ards to the comin' uv the night.

An' she was followin' after; so I thought I'd know my doom.

Fur I wanted her to anser when the cherry wuz in bloom.

I reached up in the branches, clos't, an' I pulled some blossoms fast.

An' I made a little pesey fur to help me o'er the wust.

Sez I then: "Miss Dolly, here's a nice thing; an' won't you take it, too?"

"Why, yes," she sez, "I'll hev it, an' I'll keep it just fur you."

When she stooped off a saying: "But I'm bound to hurry home."

Fur the mullin' time's a comin'—an' the cherry wuz in bloom.

Then ev'ry day that I would meet her w'd stop an' talk a spell.

But then to save my hide from Ginny my flx I couldn't tell!

I talked a heap of craps an' sich like, an' uv my feelin's some;

But somehow in the talkin' spells the right word wouldn't come!

An' I dreamt in nights about her, an' about the sweet perfume

Of the blossoms in the orch'd when the cherry wuz in bloom.

I axed her one day which she liked best, blue plums or cherries, which?

An' she loved that folks who would be fool should allus ketch the switch!

An' then she said, of she wuz some folks she'd say a thing or two.

Ez Ist what folks in a circumstance had allus got to do.

An' then I kinder took the hint like—ra'al courtin' I'd resume.

An' git back to the pnt I'd left when the cherry wuz in bloom.

So one day at a nabor's shuckin' we sorter stole away:

An' I vowed I'd bust right then and thar, or make her say her say!

Sez I, then: "Dolly, whar's them blossoms you said you'd keep fur me?"

I give 'em at the orch'd stile and thar at the cherry tree.

She sez: "Why, I have got 'em yet; an' keep 'em in my room."

They allus make me think uv you when the cherry wuz in bloom."

That sounded sorter hopeful like, an' I sez to Polly then:

"I kinder want to marry, an'—em"—she blushed an' axed me "when?"

"D' you reckon you would hev me, Polly?"—an' then she leant up near:

An' when I kissed her square—twit, too—she didn't seem to keer!

An' here is what she tol' me, sly like: "I oughtn't to perjure me."

But we'll marry, if you say so—when the cherries are in bloom."

M. V. Moore, in Detroit Free Press.



(Original.)

WILKINS had been married just a year when the first "difference of opinion" occurred between his beloved spouse and himself. First let me say that though the present Mrs. Wilkins was the first to bear his name, he was thirty when he married her. Mr. W. for ten years previous to this marriage had been wedded to the amber end of a large and richly colored meerschaum, which continued after his new alliance to share with Mrs. W. his affections. This rival the madam had tolerated for twelve whole months, but patience had at last ceased to be a virtue and this morning she declared war: "Now, George," she began, "you know you are a man of remarkable will power, and whatever you set out to do you invariably accomplish."

"Yes, wife; do you want me to overcome your protest and insist upon your buying that charming, that perfect love of a bonnet you described to me last evening?"

A year's familiarity, you see, had bred a sufficient amount of the proverbial contempt to bring him to the use of sarcasm.

"No, George, it isn't that," she continued, utterly unmindful of his implied refusal of her request, whatever it might be; "but dear hubby," and here she kissed him, "I'd love you so much more if it wasn't for that horrid old pipe of yours. How can I kiss you, dearest, and be nearly choked and poisoned every time?"

It was a pleading, doleful face that looked up into his, and as he kissed it he said he "would think the matter over," whereupon his kiss was returned with compound interest.

I have related the circumstances of this little domestic "difference" about as George told them to me after he came to the office that day, and at the conclusion of which he had spoken of "swearing off on smoke." I laughed at him and thought of it only as one of his sudden fancies.

Soon after this I visited the dove-cot one evening, and for three mortal hours was importuned by Dolly with requests to make George stop smoking. How could I promise such a thing when a pipe was my bosom friend and I counted cigars as familiar acquaintances. However, a few days later George refused my proffered weed with the remark that he had told Dolly he wouldn't smoke for a week as a trial. It was a trial to him, poor fellow. He looked like a consumptive at the end of six days, and the glance that followed the line of bluish vapor from my cheroot was pitiful to see. That night he fell.

"I tell you, old man," he said, "it was only one day more, anyway, but that one day would have landed me in

the hospital, so I did take a cigar from Dolly's father and broke my promise to her."

Once war was declared it was evident that there was to be no let up until one party surrendered. He was penitent for the broken promise, and she was forgiving, so the field was still unwon. But a fortnight saw another trial in progress. This time he held out manfully for ten long days, but it was his misfortune one night to board the grip-car with a brawny son of Erin's black duceen directly to windward. This was too much for the "weak flesh" and he again succumbed. So it went on for six months—a series of endeavors and defeats.

One day Dolly came to the office and finding George absent she spoke of her trials and tribulations proceeding from his one bad habit. It was almost with tears in her eyes that Dolly recounted the many attempts she had made to have him reform. Now to console her, and in sheer desperation, I proposed a plan, thought of on the moment, and which, knowing George pretty thoroughly, I hoped might work. My proposition to Dolly was that she reverse her former tactics and, instead of flattering him in the belief that he could accomplish whatever he had set his mind to do, to allow him to accidentally overhear her remark that men were by far the weaker sex, and that their muchvaunted will-power was a mere delusion; that she had repeatedly seen it tried and found wanting.

She strongly protested against such an imposition being practiced on "poor George," and it took me fully half an hour to overcome her scruples. This I finally succeeded in doing, and the little woman went away planning the ambush into which the poor man was to be decoyed, while your humble servant turned again to his work with a



I LISTENED TO THIS SHOWER OF ABUSE.

sigh for his friend at having such a wife, and two for himself for not having one.

George left our office that week, and I saw neither Dolly nor him for over a year. When at length we met once more it was at the railroad depot; and after the old-time custom I held out a handful of Havanos. "Smoke?"

"No!" "No?" "No!"

Refusal, question and reiterated refusal took exactly three seconds. I had to have an explanation of this, and as we took our seats in the car I asked him if he was again trying to swear off and at the same time praying the Lord that he mightn't.

"No, old man, it is a sure thing this time. I haven't drawn a whiff since last September, and its ten months ago this week. You remember the bluffs I used to make at it, for you struck the nail on the head a moment ago. Well I must tell you how I made up my mind to break off for good. One afternoon I went home unexpectedly and found Dolly had a five o'clock tea with a half-dozen of her lady friends. They were talking about men, and of course didn't know that one of the odious creatures was listening. My Dolly, my own, sweet little wife, actually spoke out and said she didn't believe men had any will power, anyway—that she, herself, had only been married a short time, but that she knew perfectly well that men as a rule were very weak creatures indeed. The curious part of it was that all the others seemed to agree with her, and such a raking over as our sex did get was a caution to Benedicts.

"As I listened to this shower of abuse directed against us lords of creation I swore (without mental reservation) that madam's statements should be given the 'lie circumstantial,' or even the 'lie direct'; and on my honor, old man, I haven't burnt even a cigarette since. It is the easiest thing in the world to stop too, I find," he said, with a superior air, which set me to laughing outright as I thought of the successful outcome of Dolly's and my conspiracy.

Mrs. Wilkins' tea table friends still meet at a mutual admiration society, and to this day continue to congratulate themselves on the successful execution of Mrs. Dolly's scheme.

While I—I remain a lonely, weak-willed bachelor, feeling myself a traitor to poor Wilkins as I offer incense in hourly devotion to my triple deity, Durham, Cavendish and Perique.

W. ERNST.

## Two Guilty Consciences.

A Danbury youth went trout-fishing the other day, and ventured to drop a sly line into a posted brook. Soon the approaching figure of the owner loomed up in the distance, and the Danbury youth knew he had been seen. He took inconspicuously to the bushes, where he spent a very miserable two hours in hiding and caught a cold that kept him two days in bed. Meanwhile the terrible owner, who was not the owner at all, had sought a similar refuge at sight of the original culprit, and not until his teeth chattered like a typewriter did he venture to leave the friendly but damp shelter and sink away from the scene. He was an elderly man, and his share in the day's sport resulted in a four-days' rheumatic limp.—Boston Transcript.

—It makes all the difference in the world whether a man or a maid calls you "my dear fellow."—N. Y. Herald.



T WAS neces-

sary to cross a great many crooked streets, turn a great many sharp corners and thread a great many narrow alleys before one came at last to the narrowest and dreariest one of all, Shea's alley. Yet it was really worth the trouble and inconvenience, for here, up two flights, in the shabbiest house of all the many shabby houses in the place one would see a very curious sight—a little girl who in all her life had never seen a blade of grass growing, or even the humblest little wayside flower pushing its head through the dark earth for a peep at the sun. As for a whole meadow full of green, waving things, noisy with the song of birds and the hum of bees, why, if you had told Liz that such a strange place really existed she would not have believed you. For Liz was cynical; she regarded most people (and their stories too) with distrust, and the more pleasing the tale the more satisfied was she that it was a pure fabrication.

Poor little Liz! She had a hump upon her back and a crutch under her arm, and all the world seemed made wrong, since she was. For Liz was not in the least like the saintly little creatures in the good story books. She was instead a real little girl who lived in Shea's alley (wherein no saint ever dwelt), and she tried no more to be good and meek than she tried to be happy and comfortable. As for the crutch it served a variety of purposes. Sometimes when she grew very angry she threw it at people, and, in turn, it often fell upon her own defenseless shoulders. It enabled her, however, to crawl downstairs into the alleyway of a hot day. On such occasions she found there a swarm of ragged children who screamed and fought with each other for amusement. Liz did not scream, but with her trusty crutch she felt ready for any assailant. Rarely did she venture further than the end of the lane. What was the use? Beyond was only another Shea's alley, longer and broader, perhaps, but not otherwise more attractive.

Liz had a sister, who would sometimes, upon a hot Sunday, don her best dress, if she happened to have one, and go away to the park. But the park was three miles distant, and it cost, moreover, a matter of five cents to reach it, so Liz had never been taken there. Who could be troubled with a crippled sister when the crowd was so great that it was only by bold elbowing and pushing that one could reach the car at all. No one expected Liz to even desire to go; but one day her sister brought home a bunch of daisies, and from that moment a great longing filled the child's heart. If only she might see the wonderful place in which these gay flowers grew. What could it be like? For many days she wondered and wondered, and one night when Nancy, her sister, came home from work she called out suddenly:

"Are there many of these near the park?"

"Many of what?" said Nancy, crossly, for she was very hot and tired.

"Many of them," pointing to a cracked tumbler wherein the daisies, carefully preserved, still stood straight and prim, their golden disks making a gay spot of color in the dingy room.

"Oh, miles of 'em!" responded Nancy, largely and grandly, her tired face brightening unconsciously as she thought of the broad field wherein, unhindered by vigilant policemen, she had roamed knee deep in grasses to pluck the kindly flower that did not scorn to grow in humble places and for humble people.

Miles of them! Poor, astonished Liz could say no more, but thenceforth the strange longing born so recently in her heart grew and grew, until it threatened to overcome her with its intensity.

Of old, angels were supposed to be the fitting bearers of joyful tidings, but in these degenerate days our angelic visitors are wont to clothe themselves in divers unromantic forms. And thus it fell out that it was a policeman, stout, red-faced and grim, who brought the good news to Liz. It was a stifling day. The August sun sent its malignant rays triumphantly into the city streets, sure of conquest. Horses drooped and fell beneath them. Travelers, in despair, sought shady corners in which to mop their heated brows. The pavements were on fire, the dusty streets seemed scorched and shriveled. The whole great city, indeed, panted and gasped for breath. In Shea's alley the entire population had turned in vain hope of comfort to the street. Women with white-faced babies crowded the doorsteps, while the children disported themselves languidly in the dust.

Liz, however, was not to be seen. As the policeman came in sight a hush fell upon the assembled tenants. Each one regarded him with a lowering, suspicious glance, and straightway searched his guilty conscience for the misdeed which had called forth this visit. His victim was evidently not among them, however, for he turned into a house close at hand and ascended the rickety stairs.

"Liz needs it more than any of them," he soliloquized, as fanning his red face violently with his hat he paused before an open door upon the second floor. Peering into the room, he saw lying upon a heap of something upon the floor a little, still figure; so still, indeed, and with such a pinched, white

face that for a moment he fancied it lifeless. Suddenly, however, Liz (for she it was) opened her eyes and regarded him fixedly, but without surprise. She knew the policeman well, as he came often to the alley, and she was wondering now, idly enough, what had happened.

But the policeman, who, after all, had a kind heart beneath his official blue coat, came into the room, and, stooping beside her, said, kindly: "You ain't sick, are you?"

Liz looked at him suspiciously, with the dislike inherent in all the children of the alley for a guardian of the peace.

"Yes," she said, irritably. "I'm always sick; my back aches, and I'm so hot." And then, in a milder tone: "Who'd you come for?"

"You," answered the policeman, smiling at his own wit. "I've a warrant for you, and I shouldn't wonder if you got thirty days or more."

Liz looked at the big man with an expression of withering scorn. Did he expect her to laugh at this poor joke? She was not in a laughing mood, if he did but know it.

The policeman, seeing that she was not disposed to be facetious, and finding the air of the room almost intolerable, decided to come to the point at once.

"Liz," he said, "I've come to find out if you will go into the country for a spell. One of them fresh air women came to me this morning and said she had a fine place in the country for some poor child. I thought of you. Will you go?"

A great wave of color dyed the child's pale cheeks. The country, where grew those miles of flowers! She to go there! She could not answer. Tears rushed to her eyes, and a great sob of happiness rose in her throat. The look upon her tired face, however, seemed to satisfy the man. He mopped his face again and turned to go.

"Tell your sister when she comes home that I'll come for you to-morrow. You'll be put upon the cars and some one will meet you at the other end. No danger. It's all straight. Wish I was going myself."

Fairland still exists, notwithstanding the verdict of sundry skeptics to the contrary. It was located that summer just twelve miles from Shea's alley. If anyone doubts it, let him ask Liz.

Oh! the birds that were there, and the flowers (if not in miles, yet in plentiful supply), and the grand old trees, and the green grass, through whose crest went a lazy ripple every time the wind blew. As for the tiny, golden-winged creatures that flitted about, here, there and everywhere, why, if they were not called fairies, but butterflies instead, the difference was only in the name.

The first long breath which Liz drew in this wonderful place seemed to intoxicate her strangely. She gave one little smothered cry, and then tap, tap, tap, went the little crutch, faster and faster, and before her wondering companion realized her intention, she had rushed to a particularly thick bed of clover and flung herself face downward into its fragrant depths. Happy Liz! Here was her dream come true. Here was what she wanted so long, all her life, for that matter, although she had not quite known it until now. Shea's alley, with its heat and noise and pain,



"TAP, TAP," WENT THE LITTLE CRUTCH.

It was a thousand miles away, in another world altogether. It surely had no part in this odorous, restful place.

And so the glorious days sped away. Days so full of delightful discovery that Liz believed her poor brain would not be able to hold all its newly-acquired knowledge. As for her misshapen body, it was growing so strong and rosy that the crutch was scarcely ever called into use now.

But alas! Vacations even in fairland cannot last forever, and a day came at length when Liz was forced to say good-by to her country friend.

The lady with whom she had been staying was very kind, however, and for a parting gift she gave Liz a promise that she should return with the returning summer. It was not much, after all, thought the lady, that she was giving; not of her own wealth, only sharing a corner of God's beautiful world with a little creature who was dying for want of it.

And so, in the clear September days, Liz went back to the city. But with her new health, strength and a gracious memory of happy summer hours, that brightened and beautified even Shea's alley.—J. Gertrude Menard, in Boston Budget.

## A Woman's Letter.

"Mary," called the husband upstairs, "why don't you come down? Haven't you finished your letter yet?"

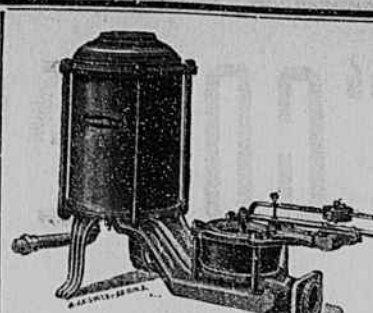
"I finished the letter long ago."

"What keeps you, then?"

"I am writing the postscript."

"Gracious me! Have I got to mind this baby two hours longer?"—N. Y. Press.

—An attaché of the British legation, in addressing a Washington girl whose name, unfortunately, does not go with the story, said: "I am sorry that the Behring sea trouble is looking so serious, because, with her splendid naval equipment, Great Britain would wipe you off the face of the earth." The young lady retorted: "What, again?" And then came a flash of silence.



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